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ABSTRACT

This publication, the fifth in a series of seven for elementary schools, is an environmental education curriculum guide with a focus on waste management issues. It contains a unit of exercises selected for fourth grade students focusing on the waste management. Litter is cited as one problem that very young children can comprehend and solve. They can learn to dispose of waste properly, help recycle some items, and come to understand how their own behavior affects the environment. The activities included in this unit use waste management to facilitate an environmental awareness and sense of environmental responsibility. The unit presents the following major ideas: (1) people learn a wide variety of habits as they grow up; (2) some people have developed habits of littering and mismanaging trash; (3) a large amount of solid waste is generated each week by family units, school classes, and communities; (4) people can make improvements in the way they manage their solid waste; and (5) there are many sources of litter in a community. Each activity in the unit meets the Virginia Department of Education Standards of Learning Objectives for Science; however, the material is designed to be interdisciplinary and may also be used to meet social studies, health, language arts, mathematics, or art requirements. A list of additional resources (articles, magazines, educational curricula) is included. (MCO)

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OPERATION WASTE WATCH THE NEW THREE RS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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GRADE 4

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OPERATION WASTE WATCH THE NEW THREE RS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Grade 4 Foreword

Ten years ago, the Division of Litter Control developed a curriculum for elementary schools called **Operation Waste Watch**, an environmental education curriculum with a focus on waste management issues. The seven grade level, multi-media units have been widely used in classrooms across the state and are considered a national model for environmental education. Each unit came with a number of peripheral teaching aids, including film strips, classroom posters, and coloring or comic books, which emphasized the theme of the unit and were designed to be taken home by the students, thereby extending and strengthening the original messages of litter control and recycling.

The instructional core of the unit was in the activity cards which presented several lessons for class or individual participation. Each teacher could select among the activities, incorporating only that material which he or she wished to use. **Operation Waste Watch** materials were designed to be interdisciplinary and may be used to meet science, social studies, health, language arts, mathematic, or art requirements. Activities in the Fourth Grade level of Operation Waste Watch correlate with several of the science objectives, as well as more generally with social studies, language arts, health, and art objectives.

This new edition of our curriculum comes in a markedly different package: a Teacher's Workbook, rather than the slip case filled with materials. Our annual surveys showed that the film strips while desired, were rarely used. The cards were hard to keep track of. The original format was never designed for refills, continual orders, or maintenance over a period of time. Many unit components got lost or strayed. As teachers moved to other schools, OWW moved in bits or pieces. After some ten years, it was time to update the bibliography and modify some of the activities to take into account the current state of the world of solid waste. All these conditions translate into a simpler format which will be easier to order and use. We hope you will enjoy this second edition of **Operation Waste Watch: The Elementary New Three Rs**.

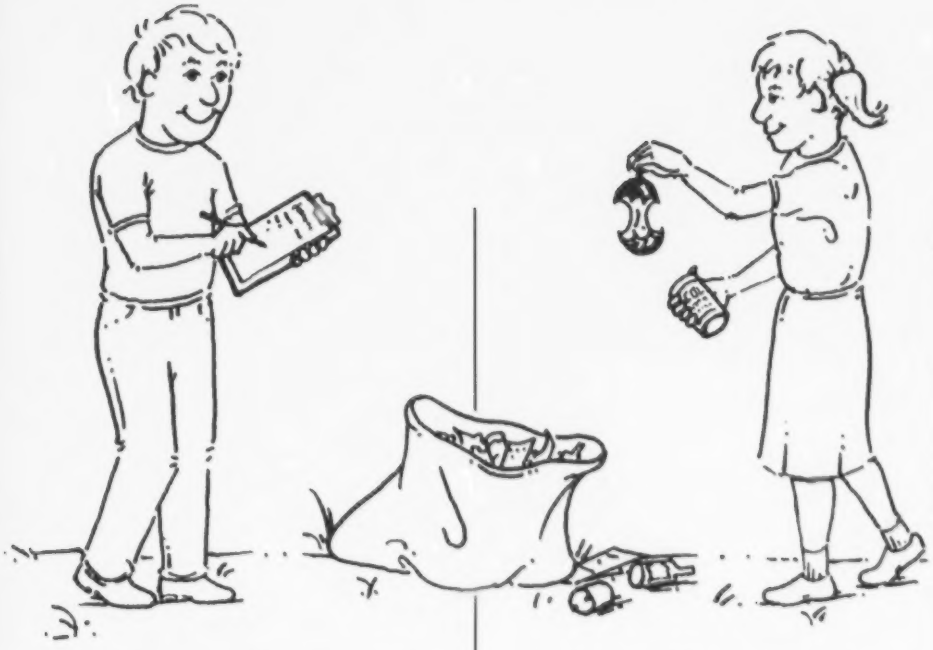
THE NEW THREE RS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The theme of the fourth grade unit is **Let's Waste Less Waste**. Students will consider changes which can be made in their homes to reduce the amount of solid waste. By extending the useful life of objects, the children will learn that people can make do with less. Students will also explore various sources of litter in their communities.

Major ideas of the unit include:

- People learn a wide variety of habits as they grow up.
- Some people have developed habits of littering and mismanaging trash.
- A large amount of solid waste in generated each week by family units, school classes, and communities.
- People can quite easily make improvements in the way they manage their solid waste. Some of these changes will lessen the community's solid waste problems. Source reduction and reuse are two new concepts for most communities and families which can also lessen the solid waste stream.
- Sources of litter in a community will include:
  1. household trash disposed of improperly
  2. commercial refuse disposed of improper
  3. Debris mismanaged at loading docks
  4. Debris mismanaged at construction sites
  5. uncovered trucks
  6. Pedestrians
  7. Motorists

At the completion of the unit, the student will be able to trace the usual way trash is handled in a typical American home. Students will be prepared to estimate the amount of trash generated in a household in one day, week, and year as well as classify the different products which make up household and school trash. Students will design a system for family and/or neighborhood refuse disposal which minimizes littering and also decreases the amount of solid waste which goes into the landfill. Students will be able to define **habit** and **norm**. They will define and recognize **litter** and identify why littering is an undesirable behavior. They will identify sources of litter in a typical neighborhood, and recognize that each person is responsible for disposing of refuse in a responsible manner.



Litter is a very accessible pollution and one even young children can comprehend. Children may be able to do very little to solve other environmental problems, but they can learn to dispose of waste properly, help recycle household and classroom items, and come to understand how their own behavior affects the environment. A waste management unit is an excellent place to begin creating environmental awareness. From this step, young people can develop a strong sense of environmental responsibility.

Many of the activities in the fourth grade unit of **Operation Waste Watch** correlate neatly with the science objectives for the Standards of Learning in grade 4. Many of the activities emphasize normative behaviors and they will look more closely and critically at behaviors which account for much day to day activity. In addition to the observation and classification skills which they have been building in the units of **Operation Waste Watch** in the earlier grades, children will observe and make inferences, and demonstrate an understanding of what they have learned, particularly about differences. The program will meet the following Standards of Learning Objectives for Science as presented by the Virginia Department of Education:

4.2

The student will observe an object or event and make several inferences regarding the identity of the object or plausible reasons for the event.

4.3

The student will construct questions and answer them by collecting and interpreting data.

4.5

The student will use collected data to make inferences or predictions.

4.6

The student will select the appropriate tool, take a measurement and report it using the appropriate unit.

4.15
Students will understand the difference between renewable and non-renewable natural resources and will describe ways in which people sometimes misuse and waste the earth's resources.

4.16
Students will know that plants and animals produce offspring that are alike in major ways but vary enough to be individuals.

The Objectives of several other different content areas can be met with the use of **Operation Waste Watch**.

Language Arts
4.1
The student will participate effectively in informal classroom discussions.

4.3
The student will identify details which support the stated main idea of a paragraph.

4.4
The student will distinguish between fact and opinion in a reading selection.

Art 4.2
The student will use past experiences and simulated situations as subject matter for art work.

4.3
The student will distinguish between works of art which have the same subject matter.

Classroom sets of comic books entitled Follow the Litter may be ordered from the Department of Waste Management by classroom teachers. Please allow three weeks for delivery. Contact:

Materials Technician
Department of Waste Management, Eleventh Floor, James Monroe Building, Richmond, Virginia 23219,
804/786-8679

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LET'S WASTE LESS WASTE

Habits and Norms

(SOL Objectives Science 4.3, 4.5; Language Arts 4.1)

Ask the children what a habit is. Elicit the response: A habit is an action a person does over and over without thinking about it. Have each child make a list of five of their own good habits. You should also participate in this activity. Collect the lists and read some of the good habits aloud without identifying the students whose lists are being shared. Read your own list. Discuss the lists with the students and then return their lists to them.

Ask the children, How can habits help us in our daily lives? How can habits sometimes cause problems?

Ask for volunteers to read the lists of their own good habits out loud. As the lists are being read, have the other children check off on their own lists any habits which are mentioned. Determine which habits that are not strictly personal appear most frequently. Explain that often habits such as drinking orange juice for breakfast can be considered norms; that is, a habit most people have that makes them tend to act in a certain way at particular times or in certain places. It is accepted and expected behavior — an unwritten rule. Ask how norms affect what we do in good and bad ways.

Discuss the following questions and the norms they concern:

- Do we wait for a green light before crossing the street? Why?
- Do we yell when playing an exciting game? Why?
- Do we raise our hands in class when we know the answer to a question? Why?
- Do most people eat three meals a day? Why or why not?
- Do most people in the United States watch television? Why or why not?

LET'S WASTE LESS WASTE

Additional Activities:

A habit is a certain action a person does over and over, often without thought or plan. A person might have a habit of watching television after school or eating the same snack in the afternoon or chewing gum. A norm is a habit most people have, such as using a knife and fork to eat meat. Make a list of norms which are practiced in this class. As an example: In this class people are generally quiet when others are speaking.

Who you are and what you do can affect norms. For example, if a young child were standing at a street crossing and began to cross the street against the red light, ask the children what would they do if they were the following: a policeman, a little old lady or man with a walking stick, another child on a bicycle, the parent of the child. Why would people act the way they do when they see a child starting to cross the street on the red light?

In our culture, when do we usually eat dessert? During the Middle Ages, in the days of the knights in armor, it was the norm to have sweets, puddings, and candy throughout the meal. Now most of us save dessert until last. What are some of the reasons this norm has changed? Another norm from the Middle Ages that is different from how we act now is that bones were thrown under the table during the meal? Why would that have been the case? Why do we not do that now? What do we do instead?

Discuss with the class some norms of behavior related to the handling of trash. Where do most teachers put trash? Where do most students put their trash? What happens to litter when it is dropped in the halls? What do students do with loose leaf or other classroom paper once they are finished with it?

Habits — Norms — Litter

(SOL Objectives Science 4.2, 4.5; Language Arts 4.1, 4.3)

Have the students write out the following questions and circle one answer for each question. They will keep their answers confidential, so they should indicate what they really do.

1. You are walking along the street eating a candy bar, and you want to get rid of the wrapper. You cannot find a trash receptacle. Where would you put the wrapper?
   a. on the sidewalk
   b. in the gutter
   c. on a pile of trash in a vacant lot
   d. in your pocket

2. You are eating lunch in the school yard. When you are finished, you take your napkin and sandwich bag to the trash can, but it is full to overflowing. What will you do with the trash?
   a. take it inside and throw it away
   b. throw it in the bushes
   c. put it carefully on top of the pile by the trash can.

3. You have finished your lunch in the cafeteria, but you are a little bit late. The cleaning people are already beginning to wipe the tables when your cup rolls off your tray. Would you
   a. always stop to pick it up?
   b. think that the cleaning people would get it for you?

4. Have you ever thrown a piece of paper on the floor of your classroom and left it there?
   once often never

5. Have you ever thrown a piece of paper to the ground in the school yard?
   once often never

6. If you saw someone littering, would you be likely to tell that person to pick up the trash he or she had dropped?

7. Parts of our school may not be as clean as they should be. Does it bother you to have trash in your school or schoolyard?
   yes no

8. You are taking a pleasant walk in your neighborhood, drinking a drink in a can. As you are finishing your drink, you walk by a trash-filled lot next door to someone's neat and pretty front lawn. Where would you be more likely to throw your can?
   a. in the lot
   b. on the lawn

After they take the quiz, go over the questions and answers and have the class consider these litter norms:

- People tend to litter where litter already appears,
- Disposing of trash carelessly is often the norm.
- People are more likely to litter when they think others will clean up after them.
- People tend to litter where they feel the property is someone else's concern.
- People ignore litter. Many people put up with loose trash.

Have the class come up with some other norms. How would a recycling program in the school or neighborhood change some of the norms?

Do people in your class write on one side or two sides of the paper? Why? What are some other options?

LET'S WASTE LESS WASTE

The Waste Box

(SOL Objectives Science 4.3, 4.6, 4.15; Language Arts 4.1, 4.4)

This is activity takes place in the students' homes and requires the cooperation of their families. Students should remove all the wastebaskets in their homes from their usual places in the various rooms and replace them with one large cardboard box. The box should be put somewhere in the house where everyone in the family can see and use it, but not in the places where a wastebasket is usually kept. Suggest to the students that the box be in the front hall or on the stairs or in the middle of the living room. The family should use only this container for the next 24 hours. Organic waste, such as garbage, should be put where it usually goes, all inorganic kitchen waste: cans, bottles, paper should be put in the special container.

The first step is for the students to weigh their substitute container before it is used. Have them record the empty weight of the box. They should also measure the boxes with a rule and record that. After the 24 hour period is up, students should again weigh their containers. They should record the following information for the entire period of their experiment: Their name, total weight collected, number in household, average pounds per day, average pounds per week, average pounds per person per year. They should also record their observations of activities and behaviors related to throwing away, or not throwing away, waste.

Class Discussion:

Have a large chart on the bulletin board and have the children enter the data from their households. Total the averages per day, week, and year to have an estimate of how many pounds of trash the families making up this class will create.

Ask the children to imagine what their homes would look like if no one used wastebaskets. What would the community look like if all this waste were just thrown about as litter. Ask the students, Why is it important to take all the waste out for the trash collectors to pick up or the family to take to the collection center or landfill?

Have the children tell about the reactions their family members had when they could not find the wastebasket in its usual place. Did anyone get upset? Why might that have happened? Did anyone in their families litter? Leave something on the counter in the bathroom or kitchen that ought to have been thrown away? How about on the floor in front of the TV? Did someone in the family create another temporary wastebasket to use while the real one was missing?

Have the class consider this point: if a person would walk all through the house to find a trash box, would that person throw trash on the ground outside? Why or why not? Do people care about the outdoors the same way they care about their homes?

Have the class come up with some ideas on how to encourage others to have better trash handling habits both indoors and outdoors. How can they establish and encourage positive norms concerning litter and waste disposal.

Further Discussion:
Are any of the families in the class participating in local recycling programs? How might this fact change their trash disposing habits? What kinds of materials do families in the class recycle?

Read the poem "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take the Garbage Out!" by Shel Silverstein. It is in **The Light in the Attic**, published by Harper Collins Children's Books, 1981.

A Family Plan

(SOL Objectives Science 4.2, 4.5, 4.6, 4.15; Language Arts 4.1, 4,3)

In The Waste Box, students looked at how their families handled its trash for one day. In this activity, students will track the amount of solid waste each of their families throw away for a week.

Data Sheet:

Name of family	# people in house	# receptacles	Lbs. discarded	Average per person

LET'S WASTE LESS WASTE

Students should weigh the trash cans in their houses and have the receptacles in their usual places. If families are collecting materials for recycling, those containers should be counted as receptacles. Pounds recycled per week should be shown on those family charts. By the time this exercise is complete, all the families will have a very heightened awareness of their disposal habits. Have the students keep track of the weight of all the trash that is discarded. They should keep records of total weight collected, number of people in household, and derive the average pounds per person/per week.

On the day when the data is brought to class, the records should be posted on a master sheet. Then discuss the following.

What does each family do with the X number of pounds of trash it discards each week? How many families recycle their newspapers? Aluminum? glass? Plastic? If they do recycle, how do they handle that? Do any families compact their trash?

After discussion of the variety of disposal habits the children have observed, have the class design a system to improve family trash disposal. Have them consider minimizing litter, decreasing the total amount of solid waste through recycling and reuse.

Map It: A Survey

(SOL Objectives Science 4.6; Language Arts 4.1, 4.3; Art 4.2)

You will need a large detailed map of the area served by your school and straight pins with different colored heads.

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Have the class look at the map and decide whether there are sites which are more likely to be littered than other spots. Review the definition of litter with the students. Have them suggest locations: parking lots, shopping centers, vacant lots, bus stops, highway entrances, neighborhood/subdivision entrances, and others. These locations should be marked with pins of one color.

Arrange a tour of the mapped area with the class on foot or by bus. On the tour, record any loose refuse seen. At each spot that has considerable litter, ask the children where this probably came from. Discuss with the class that one of the most common sources of litter is household waste carelessly disposed of. Other sources include: poorly contained commercial waste, messy delivery areas, construction sites, and uncovered trucks.

If a tour is not possible, then have the children keep records of daily observations they have made of types and locations of litter in their neighborhoods.

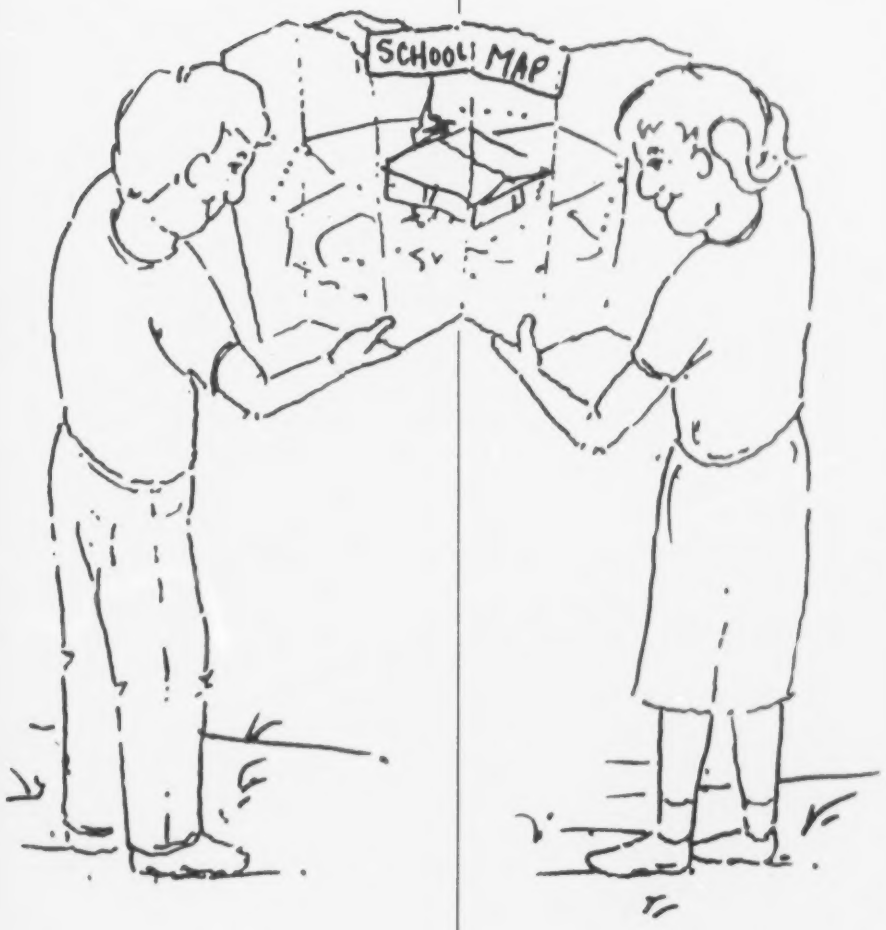
Give each student a pin of the second color and have each mark a spot where loose refuse was found.

Trash discussion should cover the following questions:

- What kinds of litter were most common?
- Is there any pattern to where litter was found? Is it more prevalent where waste containers are present or absent?
- If litter was prevalent in areas that had waste containers, were they full? Did they have covers? Could they have been knocked over, spreading the refuse around? If the containers were in good condition and not full, is it possible that people just ignored them? Why would people just toss litter on the ground?
- If litter was prevalent where there were no receptacles, why didn't people carry their waste with them until they could dispose of it properly?
- Did the class make good guesses about where litter would be found? Did they miss any places?
- What could the class do to encourage better habits about handling waste?

Discuss with the class the various reasons why people litter. Elicit in the discussion that littering can be a habit that people learn. Bring out these points in the class discussion. People litter because they think someone else will pick up after them. People litter because they learn it from their families and friends. People litter because they do not feel the property is their responsibility. Sometimes people litter because they have little respect for the environment or other people. Some people litter because they feel a certain area is their territory and they have a right to do what they want in this place.

LET'S WASTE LESS WASTE



A Neighborhood Plan

(SOL Objectives Science 4.2, 4.3, 4.15; Language Arts 4.1, 4.3)

Divide the class into three or four groups. Each group will take one area of the map used in the preceding exercise. Each group should become a block or community association for their part of the school's neighborhood. Have them develop a plan to help ensure that all the waste in the area they have chosen is properly disposed of and put in containers.

Have the students within each group select roles as committee chairpersons assigned to carry out various aspects of their plan. Have them act out their roles before the other groups in the class.

Have the class as a whole select the best three or four ideas from those presented by the role players. Plan to have some of these ideas carried out in the neighborhood. Each child in the class should also have an individual plan of action. Have the class work to carry out their plan.

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A Great Debate

(SOL Objectives Science 4.5; Language Arts 4.3)

Divide the class into two teams to debate opposing viewpoints about solid waste management in the home and neighborhood. Some possible topics include:

- All litter is undesirable.
- Is littering really a problem? Is litter so harmful or unattractive that the expense of cleaning it up is worthwhile?
- Stricter anti-littering laws are needed. Would people obey these?
- Since many people seem not to notice a littering problem, should other people, the ones who do notice, be responsible for cleaning up after them?
- If the only way to solve litter problems is for more cleanups which will take more tax money, should people be taxed more to clean up?
- Litter is a big problem in our school/classroom.
- New norms and personal habits can be established to help solve the litter problem.

Litter Cartoons

(SOL Objectives Art 4.2, 4.3)

Have the children draw cartoons about litter which focus in the first panel on one of the sources of litter. In the second panel, the person whose bad habit created the litter would appear, saying something about the litter. In the third panel, the cartoon should show something bad happening because of the littering done. In the final panel, the former litterer should tell the lesson he or she learned.

Further Activities

(SOL Objectives Science 4.2, 4.3, 4.5; Language Arts 4.1, 4.3)

Living with litter is an activity which, over the years, several classes have done and found extremely enlightening. The original exercise calls for throwing all non-food discards on the floor for the period of a week. Most classes did this for the period of one very distracting day and found the lesson clear enough. Class discussion at the end of the day (or week) centers around the following points: Did you find it difficult or uncomfortable to move around or work in the room? How did you feel when other people threw their trash in your part of the room? In what ways can the

amount of trash thrown away each day be reduced? Did the classroom look like a nice place to work? Would a visitor to the school think the room looked pleasant and attractive? Do you think that someone else should pick up after you? If everyone at home, school, or the neighborhood failed to put their trash in the proper containers, how would the world around us look? Why do you think people litter?

An archaeological dig provides further insight into our lives and our discards. At the end of the day, examine all the trash in a full trash can. Remove each piece carefully and keep record of what was drawn out and where it appeared, as shown in this example.

empty paint jar
math papers
drink can
newspaper
candy wrapper
lunch bags
chalk pieces
wet paper towel

In this example, what happened earliest in the day? When might there have been an art lesson? Why are the lunch bags near the middle of the can? What other interesting facts can be guessed at?

Derive similar questions for the class to answer after they have looked at all the trash in their can. How much of what went on during the day can be ascertained by looking at the trash?

Dr. William Rathje, an archaeologist and garbologist at Arizona State University has made many studies of landfills and the disposal habits of Americans. Two most notable articles written by him appeared in the December 1989 issue of the *Atlantic* and the May 1991 issue of *National Geographic.*

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Articles:

Rathje, William; "Once and Future Landfills;" *National Geographic*, May 1991; published by the National Geographic Society, Washington, DC.

Rathje, William; "The Garbage Crisis;" *Atlantic Monthly*; December 1989.

"Reading, Writing, and Recycling, A Catalog of Education Materials;" *resource RECYCLING*, December 1990, published by Resource Recycling, Portland OR 97209.

"Recycling Makes the Grade in Schools," *Reusable News*, Spring, 1990; United States Environmental Protection Agency; RCRA Information Center, 401 M Street S. W., Washington DC 20460.

"The Trashing of Virginia;" series of articles printed in the Richmond *Times Dispatch*; August 26-29, 1990; Richmond Newspapers, Inc.; Richmond VA 23261.

Magazines:

Garbage: The Practical Journal for the Environment; published bi-monthly by Old House Journal Corp.; 435 Ninth Street, Brooklyn NY 11215.

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resource RECYCLING: North American's Recycling Journal; published monthly by Resource Recycling, Inc.; 1206 N.W. 21st Avenue, Portland OR 97209.

Waste Age; published monthly by the National Solid Waste Management Association; Suite 1000, 1730 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W., Washington DC 20036.

Educational Curricula:

A Curriculum Activities Guide to Solid Waste and Environmental Studies (K-12); Institute for Environmental Education; 3200 Chagrin Boulevard, Cleveland OH 44124.

Garbage In America; Refuse Industry Productions, Inc.; P. O. Box 1011, Grass Valley CA 95945.

Garbage Reincarnation: Curriculum Guide (4-6); Garbage Reincarnation, Inc.; Post Office Box 1375, Santa Rosa CA 95402.

Let's Recycle (K-6, 7-12); The United States Environmental Protection Agency; Public Information Center, 401 M Street, S.W., Washington DC 20460.

Mobius Curriculum: Understanding the Waste Cycle (4-6); Browning Ferris Industries, Inc.; 8607 Roberts Drive, Suite 100, Atlanta GA 30350.

New Three Rs: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle (6-12); Virginia Department of Waste Management; Eleventh Floor, James Monroe Building, Richmond VA 23219.

People and Their Environment (1-3, 4-6); A conservation project of the National Council of State Garden Clubs, ©Brentree Environmental Center; Brentree Farms, Inc., Milford PA; published by Bayberry Press; Port Washington NY.

Project WILD (K-6); contact Virginia State Coordinator Suzie Gilley, Wildlife Education Specialist; Department of Game and Inland Fisheries; P. O. Box 11104, Richmond VA 23230-1104.

Save It! Easy Environmental Tips to Save the Earth; developed by Corporation for Public Broadcasting; published by Custom Print, Inc.; 2611 Shirlington Road, Arlington VA 22206.

Think Earth Environmental Education Program (K-3, 4-6 available 1992); Educational Development Specialists; Think Earth Customer Service, 5505 East Carson Street, Suite 200, Lakewood CA 90713.

Waste: A Hidden Resource (7-12); Keep America Beautiful, Inc.; 9 West Broad Street, Stamford CT 06902.

Waste In Place (K-7): Keep America Beautiful, Inc.; 9 West Broad Street, Stamford CT 06902.

Other Information:

The Fourth R: An Implementation Guide for School Recycling and Solid Waste Management; produced by Association of Vermont Recyclers; P. O. Box 1244, Montpelier VT 05601.

How to Set up a School Recycling Program; produced by the Council for Solid Waste Solutions; 1275 K Street N. W., Suite 400, Washington DC 20005.

Setting Up a Solid Waste Recycling Program in Schools; ©J. Winston Porter; produced by McDonald's Corporation; One McDonald's Plaza, Oak Brook IL 60521.

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